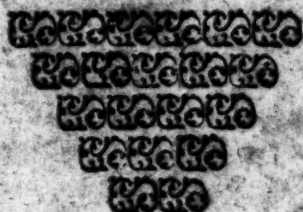


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A
SERMON
AGAINST
Detraction.

K
P REACH'D by A. H. A. M.
Chaplain to his Grace the Duke of
Richmond.



L O N D O N;

Printed by H. Meere, for the Author. 1707.

A
SERMON
AGAINST
Defection.

PREACHED BY A. H. A. M.
Christ to his Grace the Duke of
Richmond.

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St. James, Chap. I. Ver. 19.

Let every Man be swift to hear, slow to speak.

THAT we have more Occasion for Hearing, than Speaking, seems to be hinted to us in the Structure of our Bodies, Providence having made the Instruments of one Faculty double to that of the other.

Neither is the Tongue, tho' single, purely design'd to the Employment of Words, but has a whole Sense of Tasting to manage besides; so that a dumb Man cannot be said to have it for nothing.

And if we consider, that Hearing is generally much more instructive and advantageous to us, than Speaking, the great Wisdom both of Nature's Contrivance, and the Apostle's Advice, will be apparent.

For all the Advantage which the Speaker gains, is, at the most, but fixing those Things which he knows already, more firmly in his Mind, by repeating them; whereas the Hearer usually enriches himself with something new.

And tho' the Matters deliver'd happen to be ordinary, or not to the Purpose, yet then he is capable of making no unserviceable Remarks upon the Defects of others; whilst he that errs upon the Speaking-Extream, is in great Danger of publishing his own.

Farther, in all Probability, that Hearing which the Text mentions, is not to be confin'd to one Sense, but refers to all Sort of Information, whereby the Mind is capable of being improv'd, whether it be by conversing with others, or with our selves.

And then the Meaning of the Words will be, that we ought to improve our Time, rather in increasing our Knowledge, than in making a needless Ostentation of what we have already. Our much Talking, besides the other Inconveniencies it makes us liable un-

to, is usually prejudicial to us; because it hinders us from those Observations, which a more silent and reflecting Demeanour would furnish us with.

In speaking to which *Argument*, I shall consider,

First, What is meant at large, by being *swift to hear*.

Secondly, I shall shew, what is imply'd in the Phrase, of being *slow to speak*.

Thirdly, I shall shew the Reasonableness of this Command.

Fourthly, Observe some Directions, in Order to the Attainment of this Vertue.

First, What is meant at large, by being *swift to hear*.

In speaking to which Particular, I shall first shew what is not meant by it.

First therefore, by being *swift to hear*, is not meant an attentive Willingness to hear ill of another. It is easily observable, that there is no Subject of Discourse more entertaining amongst the Generality of People, than the Faults of others.

Tell them, that their Neighbour has done some worthy Action, and that his Vertue has advanc'd him to an honourable Station, and that he is likely to flourish in this and in the other World; and then we may often observe, that either such an Account as this, is receiv'd with a drowzy Sort of a Version, as if the very naming the Happiness of another, had an apoplectical Quality in it, and had almost stupify'd us; or else we raise some Objection against the Merit or Success of his Actions.

But when the Relation pretends to give an Account of the Follies and Vices of another, then our Attention is immediately rous'd up, as if we wish'd all our Senses turn'd into Hearing; and, by our encouraging and credulous Gesture, the Relator is invited both to be particular in his Story, and severe in his Censure of it.

Now, this (being desirous to hear another ill spoken of) will, when examin'd, be found to proceed from an envious and malicious Disposition, that we account our Neighbour's Unhappiness a Satisfaction to ourselves, either because it keeps his Condition from rising to an Equality with our own, or draws it down to it, because it makes us believe, that he is no better secur'd for the Future, than our selves are.

Som

Some such ill-natur'd Reason makes us reckon the Folly or Misfortune of another, an Advancement to us; for if we did not esteem it such, we should not be pleas'd with the Relation of it.

But besides that our being desirous of hearing Reports of this Nature, argues us to be of a narrow and uncharitable Spirit, it likewise gives the Slanderer Encouragement to asperse the Reputation of others, because he knows such Discourse is acceptable to us; which makes us, in some Measure, guilty of the same Fault, because we encourag'd the Commission of it, and did not vindicate our Neighbour's Reputation, when we knew it injur'd, or shew our Dislike and Disbelief of all censorious Conjectures of Ill about him.

Secondly, By being *swift to hear*, is not meant a Curiosity of being inform'd in those Things which don't concern us; for this is not only a vain Consumption of Time, but has often very prejudicial Effects upon us; for it makes the Mind trifling and unstable, apt to fly off from its more weighty Business, into light and insignificant Enquiries upon the least Occasion.

Besides, the Memory of the Curious is usually so harass'd with nice Distinctions, that there is scarce any Room for that which is useful; his animadversive Faculties are so streighten'd, that he can't pursue all Things at once.

So likewise is our Memory unable to retain infinite Things, but is in Danger to have its old Impressions jumbled out of Order and defac'd, by the coming in of new ones; and also is more unprepar'd for the convenient Disposal of fresh Supplies, when it is busy in reflecting on, and sorting what it is possess'd of already.

Farther, those that make it their Business to search into the Retirements of others, do often meet with some disobliging Discovery or other which disturbs them; and therefore those, who would secure themselves from the present Trouble and ill Consequence of Anger, must not indulge themselves in Curiosity, because this Humour will be sure to supply their Passion with fit Matter to work upon.

Lastly, It is observ'd, that the Curious are most frequently employ'd in making their Enquiry into the

Defects, Indecencies, and Misfortunes of others; which is done most commonly, either with a Design to expose them, or else to give themselves a secret Pleasure, by finding their Neighbour in such disadvantageous Circumstances, which are bad Signs of their good Wishes to him, and therefore those that affirm the Curious to be generally malicious, have great Reason for their Observation.

Having now shewn what is not meant by being *swift to hear*, I shall shew what it is, which consists in a Willingness to improve our Understanding in useful Truths, and in attending to them, which may be reduc'd.

First, To right Apprehensions of our Religion, which consists in the Knowledge of the Nature of God, our Relation to him, and what he expects from us, together with the different State of the Good and Bad in the Life to come.

The Want of the right Understanding, and frequent Consideration of these Things, is the Cause of most of the Folly and Wickedness in the World.

This is that Truth, which this Apostle tells us, came down from Heaven, and which he cautions us not to err from, *James* 1: 16, 17, 18.

A second Thing, which we ought to be desirous to be inform'd of, is our own Faults and Imperfections.

All People are naturally inclinable to flatter themselves; and if they can find any Thing, that looks like a peculiar Advantage, tho' it be never so thin and imaginary, yet they are willing to cheat themselves into a Belief of some extraordinary Excellency in it; which makes them live such perfect Strangers to themselves, without the least Glimpse of their true Condition, oftentimes (it is to be fear'd) not discovering their Mistake, till it is too late to retrieve it.

Now, in Order to the preventing an Error of such dangerous Consequence, we shou'd consider, how frail and dependent our Condition is, in Respect of all worldly Conveniences, that we can neither command those Things which we want, nor secure them which we have already.

This Consideration urg'd home, would effectually disengage us from all Self-Opinion: It would make us adore God with all Humility, and be truly thankful

for whatever we enjoy ; and as it is our Interest to reflect upon the Imperfection of our Nature, so it is likewise to consider the Sinfulness of it.

We should frequently take a Review of our Actions, and examine how far they come short of, and disagree with that Rule we ought to walk by.

To converse with a Man's own moral Defects, and impartially to recollect his Breach of Duty, and Miscarriage towards God, his Neighbour, and himself, is the most profitable Exercise he can entertain himself with : For this will give a full Conviction of the Indecency and Danger of such Actions, and either make him ashamed, or afraid to commit them for the future. And therefore, when we hear others censur'd, instead of pleasing our selves with the Publication of their Faults, we may spend our Thoughts in a much more innocent and prudent Employment ; that is, in considering, whether we are not, or have not been guilty of the same our selves.

Now, except we make it our Business to spy out, and examine our Miscarriages, it will follow, that many of them will pass undiscover'd ; and, consequently, will be both unrepented of, and unamended for the future ; there being no Reason to expect a Reformation from those, who are not sensible, that they have done amiss.

Which brings me to the third Thing, we should be desirous to hear or understand ; which is, how the repeating of Errors and Sins of our past Life may be prevented for the future. Which is done by considering their Occasion, and avoiding, as far as the necessary Concerns of this Life will give leave, all Opportunities and Incitements to them.

To which End, we ought, in the first Place, to beg God's Assistance to second our Endeavours, and then fortify our selves with great Care and Resolution, where we are the least defensible ; and either upon the Account of the peculiar Circumstances of our Condition, Custom, or natural Inclination, are likely to be press'd hardest by the Temptation.

It ought to be our great Business to make our Lives as correct as may be ; for otherwise, to know our Faults, without reforming them, will only serve to make us the more inexcusable.

In these Things therefore, which we are concern'd to know, this Swiftmess to hear is oppos'd to Stupidness and Neglect, and consequently imports Attention. We ought to attend to our own Thoughts, and the Instruction of others, that we may be truly inform'd, both what we have, and what we should have done. Our Actions must be rightly stated for the Time past, otherwise they cannot be well directed for that which is to come. Those Persons who think the governing of their Lives religiously, to be a Business of inferiour Concern, and who esteem the Examination of their Actions by the Rule of God's Word, not to be worth their Trouble. These Sort of People give a more than ordinary Suspicion, that the Hopes and Fears of another Life signify little with them, and that their Conscience is stupify'd almost beyond the Sense of Good and Evil.

Secondly, This Readiness to hear, is oppos'd to Prejudice, and so it signifies Indifferency. He that is obstinately engag'd to one Side of the Question, cannot be said to be willing to hear, because he has barr'd up his Assent against every Thing that contradicts his own Opinion; and if he is in the Right, it is more Chance, than Reason; and if he is not, a tenacious Principle, if maintain'd, will never suffer him to be otherwise.

Therefore it very much concerns us to keep our Minds open to Conviction, and censure our Actions and Opinions too (if they be singular) with great Freedom and Impartiality; and always follow the safest Advice, tho' it may be something the more troublesome at present; and take Care, that the Sensuality and Wickedness of our Lives, may never make it our Interest to wish the Arguments for a good Life inconclusive.

For if this happens to be our Case, our corrupt Affections will impose upon our Understandings, and make us believe not according to the Evidence of Things, but according to our own liking, and to take a short and miserable Shelter in a most fatal Delusion.

I come now to the second Vertue, which is commanded us by the Apostle in the Text, and that is, to be *slow to speak*. By which is not meant a fullen or affected Silence; which if it be not put on upon the Account

count of the Persons that are convers'd with, then it argues some Distemper either of Mind or Body.

But when we make our selves Mutes out of Design, this proceeds either from a Neglect, or some other Dislike of the Company. Or else, because we have a Mind to make our selves Spies upon the Words and Actions of others; which as it is commendable enough, provided it be not too open, when it is done for our own Instruction, or for the friendly Admonition of those who are concern'd; so on the contrary, when we make our Remarks to expose others, and make Sport with their Imperfections, this is malicious and unworthy, and is to be avoided, as being neither necessary nor agreeable, and consequently cannot be intended by the Apostle.

To be *slow to speak* therefore, in the Sense of the Text, implies no more, than a prudent Considerativeness, by which we weigh and examine the Fitness of what we deliver, and by which we can command our selves into Silence upon Occasion, and consequently prevent those Inconveniencies which proceed from heedless and rash Speaking.

Which brings me to shew, in the next Place, the Reasonableness of this Command, by which the Contents of it will be farther explain'd. Now, this considerative Reservedness will prevent these following Inconveniencies in our Speech.

First, It will prevent its being unseasonable.

Secondly, Superfluous.

Thirdly, Injurious.

Fourthly, Ignorant.

Fifthly, Immoderate or passionate.

First, This Care will prevent Unseasonableness in our Speech. *A Word spoken in Season*, (says Solomon) *how good is it?* And on the contrary, when it is not, that Discourse, which would otherwise be counted grateful and prudent, becomes nauseous and disobliging. I shall give some Instances, wherein we are guilty of this Fault.

First, Therefore our Speech is unseasonable, in Respect of the Person, when we usurp upon the Right of others, and don't give them Leisure to answer to what was propounded to them.

For

For, by doing thus, we reproach both him that propos'd the Question, and him that was to return the Answer, with Ignorance. The first, because he had so little Judgment, as to ask a Person unqualify'd to satisfy him: The second, because he could not answer the Expectation of the Demandant.

The sudden forestalling another's Answer, therefore, and obtruding one's own, (if it be never so much to the Purpose) argues a Man to be affected, and vain glorious.

But if it be impertinent, (and it is well if the Suddenness of it does not make it so) then there is nothing more odiously ridiculous. And tho' this may seem only to extend to a Point of Decency, yet we may observe, that the Unseasonableness of Discourse in this Matter, tends to the lessening the Esteem of those who are guilty of it, and makes their Society less acceptable; and therefore it ought to be avoided.

Secondly, That Discourse is unseasonable, which is not accommodated to the present Passions and Circumstances of those we converse with, which is done, when we endeavour to divert those with Mirth and Pleasantness, who are newly fallen into any great Affliction.

For this looks as if we not only thought they deserv'd it, but were glad they had it; which is a barbarous insulting over another's Misery.

And so likewise, to converse in a melancholick Mood, and to entertain with the broken Accents of disconsolate Sorrow, that Person who is lately advanc'd to a comfortable Condition, argues that we envy their Happiness, and think them unworthy of it.

This Carriage is quite contrary to St. Paul's Advice, who bids us, *Rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

The Contradiction of which good-natur'd Command, in the fore-mention'd Instances, does, in the best Sense, prove us to be over-grown with a stoical Kind of Insensibleness, and that we are so intent upon, and wrap'd up in our own Interest, that the Good or Evil of our Neighbour, tho' never so considerable, can make no suitable Impression upon us.

Farther, if we would prevent the Unseasonableness of Conversation, we ought not only, with a moderate Sympathy, to take Notice of the great Alteration of our Neigh-

Neighbour's Condition, but likewise to manage our Discourse, and not to speak any Thing, which we believe to be either ungrateful or upbraiding.

For except this only be observ'd, there will be more of Trouble, than Pleasure in it : For tho' some are so candid as to give the best Interpretation of a doubtful Expression, or so charitable as to forgive where it has no Excuse, but the Indiscretion of the Speaker ; yet there are not a few, who are exceptionous and resenting, who are apt to disturb themselves and others too, if they can, when they deliver any Thing, which they imagine proceeds from Disaffection or Neglect of them.

Now, all these unfortunate and diseussful Slips being the Effects of Rashness, there is nothing so proper as Consideration to prevent them.

Secondly, This prudent Reservedness and deliberating with our selves, will prevent our Speech from being superfluous. Now, to know when our Speech is so, we must consider the End of it ; and when it answers no Part of our Design, we may conclude it is so.

We may very easily and reasonably observe, that the Design of Talking, is, first, either to supply our own Needs, by discovering what we want to others, whom we conceive able to assist us.

Or else, secondly, to benefit others, by propounding something to them, which may be for their Advantage.

Or, thirdly, the Design of Speaking, is for the Delight and Recreation of each other ; it follows therefore, that when Discourse is neither profitable nor pleasant, it must be needless, impertinent, and superfluous.

And tho' those idle Words, which our Saviour tells us, *Math. 12. 36.* that Men shall give an Account of in the Day of Judgment, are not meant of barely useless, but of lying and blasphemous Discourse, as appears from the Context, and the Dialect of the sacred Writers.

Yet (notwithstanding there is no great Heinousness in it) a considering Person would not be guilty of it, because it is unbecoming the Dignity of human Nature, and therefore ought to be forborn, out of Respect to our Reason and Understanding.

Now, this Superfluity of Talk, tho' not of Naughtiness, is speaking unto the Air, and making us seem Bar-

Barbarians to others, as well as those mention'd by *St. Paul, 1 Cor. 14.* For a Man might as well talk in an unknown Language, as to no Purpose in one that is known, the latter being as unedifying, and, perhaps, less diverting than the former.

Now, this Error in Conversation proceeds commonly more from want of Care, than Judgment: For if we weigh'd what we deliver'd in the Ballance, we should find it wanting; and, in Justice to our selves, would keep us from exposing it to the Censure of others.

A third Inconvenience which advis'd, and slow Speaking will prevent, is, the Ignorance or Impropriety of our Speech, in Respect to a Thing which is spoken to; when we heedlessly talk about that which we don't understand, or give our Answer before we have the Import and Meaning of the Question.

Now, *Solomon* and Reason tells us, that *he that answers before he understands the Matter, it is Folly and Shame to him.* But this is not all; for this zealous Over-hastiness in Talking, is often attended with other ill Consequences; sometimes leading others into prejudicial Errors, who depended upon our Judgment; sometimes tending to our own Damage or Disgrace, either making us recant our Opinion, or else, according to the Manner of too many, obstinately persist in the Defence of a known Mistake, because we will not submit to the Disreputation of owning it; tho', in Reality, it is much more rational and ingenious to confess our Faults, than maintain them.

Now, what can be more effectual to avoid these absurd and dangerous Consequents, than to consider, and stay for the full Meaning of what is propounded to us, always proportioning our Discourse to the Weight and Quality of the Matter we treat about, mentioning Things of great Concernment with Gravity and Composure? The doing of which, is not on'y profitable, but grateful too.

A fourth Vice incident to Discourse, is slandering the absent, which is commonly the Effect of a random and inconsiderate Fluency. Men are apt to make hard and unreasonable Constructions of their Neighbours Actions, never considering the Meanness and Injustice of such Censures,

Censures, nor how prejudicial they may be to the Party and themselves.

All Thoughts of this Nature are over-born with a Torrent of Words impossible to be recall'd, and for which it is much easier to repent, than to make Satisfaction.

We may also attribute to the same Cause the divulging of Secrets, by which our own Affairs and others are very much damnify'd: A Practice, when it only relates to our selves, foolish; when it concerns others, injurious and infamous; so unworthy, that the Son of *Sirach*, in his Book of *Ecclesiasticus*, thought it sufficient to dissolve the strictest Friendship. *Revealing of Secrets, even Friends will part*, says he, *chap. 27. 21.* And that this Inconvenience proceeds often from unadvised Speaking, constant Experience confirms.

People in such a Case as this, usually saying, that it was out before they were aware; the Folly and Fruitlessness of which Excuse, is a sufficient Commendation of Caution and Reservedness, the Vertue recommended here in my Text, of being *slow to speak*.

Fifthly, This deliberating with our selves, is a good Expedient against immoderate Anger. *Be slow to speak, slow to Wrath*, says the Apostle; intimating, that observing the first, will keep us from any excessive Proneness to the latter.

His Meaning therefore, is, that we should not be quick and sudden in our Expostulations upon a Provocation given, such violent Breath being apt to blow us up into a Flame: Whereas a calm and deliberate Return, if it does not reduce the injuring Person to an Acknowledgment of his Fault; yet it breaks the first, and commonly the fiercest Impression of the Injury, and hinders us from being transported beyond the Bounds of Reason and Sobriety.

The fourth Observation, I at first propounded, was to offer some Considerations, in Order to the Attainment of this Vertue. When therefore we find our selves inclin'd to Talking, we should frequently stop, until we have examin'd our selves concerning the Necessity, the Fitness, and the Warrantableness of what we are about to deliver.

We should inquire, whether the Subject affords us any good Grounds for our Haste and Eagerness? Whether

ther the Matter be so important, and the Occasion be so pressing, as the Importunity of our Desires seems to suggest?

And provided our Silence be not a Fault, it is most advisable to deny our selves the Pleasure of Speaking, when we find we are most inclinable to it: Because when we are thus forward, we ought to suspect it is some heedless Passion or other which urges us on, which we shou'd stifle in our own Breast, or check it, at least, by a cool and indifferent Breath, either diverting from the Subject we are so fond of, or else managing it with more Temper and Unconcernedness, than the Heat of our Inclinations would willingly allow.

For this Sort of Zeal is commonly neither according to Knowledge, nor Discretion; something strikes a Man's Imagination with a more than ordinary Agreeableness, and therefore he concludes, that the Account of it must be equally acceptable to others. Whereas a little Pause and Thinking would inform him, that the Pleasure of such a Discourse depends upon its Relation to a particular Interest, and requires a particular Disposition to relish it, and set it off; and therefore it must be flat and unseasonable to different Humours and Circumstances.

But this is only the least of the Inconveniences, which follow from our giving Way to this sudden Impulse of Speaking, as will appear afterwards.

In short, tho' we are assur'd of the Innocence of what we are about to say; yet the safest Way, is, to be silent, when we perceive our selves very desirous of Speaking: For this voluntary Restraint of a lawful Liberty, will break the Force of our Passion, and make it more managable.

But those who won't take this Pains with themselves, but presently bolt out whatever they have a Mind to, will often make an unfortunate Discovery of themselves, and say a great many Things, which they will repent of, and wish they had never been spoken.

Which leads to a second Motive, to wit, we should consider the Indecencies and Mischiefs of rash and vicious Speaking, which have happen'd both to our selves and others, how unseemly and dangerous it has prov'd,

prov'd, how much it reflects upon our Discretion, how often it has made us utter either unseasonable and prejudicial Truths, or slanderous Falsities; sometimes making us childishly and scandalously trifling, and sometimes furiously savage and ungovernable, transporting us beyond Justice, Prudence, and Charity.

We ought frequently to represent the Inconveniences of such Miscarriage to our Minds, in their most aggravating Circumstances; the Folly and ill Consequences of which being urg'd home, will, not only in Point of Interest and Credit, put us upon a more cautious Management, but likewise prevent our having any more such an uneasy unacceptable Employment, as recollecting what we have foolishly and dangerously spoken, must needs be to us.

Thirdly, we ought to consider the Advantage of the contrary Practice, how prudent and grateful it is to keep our Words within Compass, both in Respect of the Matter and Manner of Speaking; to press nothing beyond Duty and Decorum, but to preserve a just Regard to Persons, Places, Times, and Things.

This would prove an effectual Expedient to prevent those troublesome, and sometimes fatal Disputes, which arise from sudden and unweigh'd Expressions; and would render Conversation much more innocent and entertaining, than it is otherwise to be expected.

For where this Guard is not kept, there is more Security and Pleasure in being alone; so that the End of Society is lost, which is intended for Delight and mutual Endearments, and to make People more inclinable to be serviceable to each other.

Whereas want of Care and Decency in managing Correspondencies of this Nature, if it be not the Occasion of open Breaches, yet it makes Men have meaner Opinions one of another; it alienates their Affection to that Degree, that they are more unwilling to oblige their Acquaintance, than if they had been perfect Strangers to them.

But were People more careful not to fall upon their Neighbours Imperfections or Misfortunes, nor talk any Thing which argu'd Disaffection or Neglect, this would take away the Foundation of all Disgust, and make their

their Familiarity improve into unusual Kindness and Good-will.

It is easy to imagine, how advantageous a wary Reservedness might be in our Converse, when it does not fall into an anxious and morose Suspiciousness.

How effectually would such a considerative Frame of Spirit check a vain and ostentatious Humour, and keep Men from making themselves ridiculous, by a nauseous Commendation of their own Worth.

If this Point were observ'd, People surely wou'd not expose their own Weakness, to please the Malice of their Enemies, and disoblige their Friends so often as they do.

Then they might examine the Management of their Conversation with some Satisfaction; and not be uneasy at the Reflection upon their own Folly.

For tho' their own talkative Humour, or the Diversion of Company, may make it slip their Notice at first; yet there are few so unthinking, as not to be sensible of some Part of it afterwards.

And as this setting a Watch before our Mouth, will make our Lives much more secure and inoffensive, both to our selves and others, than otherwise they would be; so the Thought and Reflection upon this Government of our selves, must needs be Matter of great Satisfaction unto us, because we may observe it to be a Vertue both very useful and very rare.

It is an Argument of a great Command of our Passions, of a vigilant and well compos'd Mind; and is no vulgar Instance of a religious and consummated Wisdom; and is not to be expected without great Care and Observation.

But after all, we ought not to rely so much upon our own Conduct and Discretion, as to forget to pray for God's Assistance; without which we can't expect to make any considerable Progress in this, or any other vertuous Attempt.

For Conclusion therefore, let us pray in the Language of our Church. *O God, forasmuch as without thee, we are not able to please thee, mercifully grant, that thy holy Spirit may in all Things direct and rule our Hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

